

# The Ballarat Naturalist

September 2017



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## Birds of Creswick – past and present

Presented by Ian Ashton

The talk by Ian Ashton covered not only his own observations of the birds around Creswick but the changes in numbers and species recorded since the late 1800s by various authors and observers.

T. Boyles, in the book *Old Creswick* written by J A Graham, refers to his childhood when there were ‘*hundreds of ducks and wildfowl on Hepburn’s Lagoon. Other game was also plentiful – wild turkeys, ibis, plover, quail, snipe.*’ Wild fowl on ephemeral swamps such as Hepburn Lagoon would have been a main source of food for the Dja Dja Warrung inhabitants and then for the squatters and other Europeans who took up the land for grazing in the 1840s.



–Photo: Tawny Frogmouth

Wildflower Walk  
10 am– 12 noon Sunday 22 October  
Meet 10 am Wilson St., east of water tank

In 1911 an ex-student of Creswick Grammar School in the 1880s, JA Leach, wrote *An Australian Bird Book; pocket book for field use*. In 1930 Harold Payne, a forestry student in Creswick, produced a list of 86 birds for that area which was followed by a list of 136 species produced by another forestry student Roger Cowley in 1960. In 1973 Roger Thomas revised Cowley's list to 138 and today Ian's Creswick list of Creswick birds has risen to 193, with the assistance of Field Naturalists' groups, Birdlife Ballarat and individual observers.

This remarkable increase in overall bird species number hides many interesting variations, such as: new arrivals, e.g. Magpies, Powerful Owl, Brush Bronze-wing, Little Pied Cormorant, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo; and losses of certain species, e.g., Emus, Curlews, Speckled Warblers, Yellow Tufted Honeyeater; some species that disappeared and then returned over the years. The increase in species number includes the arrival of exotic species, such as Starlings, Blackbirds, Minahs, Spotted Dove and Mallards.



**Photo:** White Heron

Some species, e.g., Noisy Miner disappeared and then returned over the years, only to disappear once more. Ian explained that these changes can only be understood through a knowledge of the historical changes in human population, their uses of the land and the incidence of events such as droughts, floods and fires.

He outlined major changes that occurred in the 1840s with the arrival of Europeans and their livestock and the concurrent loss of tenure by Aboriginal people. Then came the Gold rush in 1852 with an explosion in European and Chinese populations which some estimates suggest grew to around 25 000 around Creswick by 1855 and had massive impact on the vegetation. Drainage of swamps for farming,



### **Excursion: Melton Botanic Gardens**

**Saturday 2 September:** following the Friday talk re the Botanic Gardens, FNCB will view, in Melton, the work done by the Friends of the Melton Botanic Gardens. After this event there will be a tour of other reserves in the area. Leader: Claire Dalman

and other changes to hydrology such as dam building, would also have led to changes in bird distribution.

Other reasons for the increase in species observations, by nearly 50 species between 1930 to 2017, could be: improved transport and equipment, e.g. binoculars and recorders; the large growth in interest in birds; and increase in books and other sources of information.

From Ian and Amanda's home at Allendale, Ian also noted the impact of weather conditions on variations in species seen over the years and seasons. For instance, droughts and floods can result in increases and reductions of different species- shallower water bringing more birds than deeper water or swamps completely drying up. Large fires have greatly affected vegetation and food sources across the area, and hence decreases in bird numbers. Also warmer conditions may be extending the range of some species southward.

Changes in farming practice such as stubble burning are another factor, as is the harvest of pine plantations which can suddenly reduce the food source of certain species. Weed infestations, e.g. gorse can provide good nesting habitat for certain species, and the sudden eradication of weeds can have devastating effects for species such as the Striated Fieldwren.

We thank Ian for coming into town with Amanda on a cold night and for sharing his knowledge via his interesting and informative talk.

John Petheram

### **Brisbane Ranges Excursion Sunday 17 September**

An invitation to FNCB to attend is extended  
by Geelong Field Naturalist Club Bird Group

Enquires: John Gregurke

## August Excursion - Skipton Common

Our excursion, originally planned for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August, was postponed due to very wet and windy conditions making it unsuitable to undertake the proposed survey. The work was to conduct a survey of *Pimelea spinescens subsp. spinescens*, the Spiny Rice-flower, at the Skipton Common Native Grassland Reserve. The visit was re-scheduled to the following Thursday.



Photo: Quadrat survey

On that day eight field naturalists made the journey to Skipton and despite the strong cold winds, a sunny day made the survey work quite enjoyable. The aim of the excursion was to assist the Ballarat Environment Network (BEN) undertake a

survey of this species at the Skipton Common Reserve which is public land managed by BEN, the committee of management.

The reserve which comprises predominantly remnant native grassland has recently been newly-fenced in sections to improve management of grazing. Grazing is now more rigorously controlled through an agreed agistment system controlled by BEN to better define areas to protect the Spiny Rice-flower population.

The Spiny Rice-flower is a perennial shrub growing 5-30cm in height. Leaves are green and oval-shaped about 2-10mm long and grow from stems that are sometimes spine-tipped, hence the common name. The species is mostly dioecious (plants are either female or male). Females have a protruding style and small non-functional anthers whilst the males have two anthers with abundant bright orange pollen which makes them reasonably easy to identify. It is endemic to Victoria and, with its close relative, the Wimmera Rice-flower *Pimelea spinescens subsp. pubiflora*, are both listed as *Critically Endangered* in Australia. Around 90% of the population occurs in the Western Basalt Plains Grassland community in the Victorian Volcanic Plains Bioregion. Less than 10% of this population is protected in reserves, with most plants occurring on road reserves, beside railway lines and on private land. This makes the plants found in Skipton Common Reserve a particularly significant popula-



tion being in a reserve managed for conservation (see SWIFFT website).

BEN has recently received a three-year funding allocation from the *Pimelea Conservation Trust Fund* that as trustee, *Trust For Nature* administers the funds. These funds allow: the establishment of an ongoing monitoring program; a detailed baseline survey of the population in the reserve; the recording of such observations as recruitment of individual plants in the future; and the recording of how individual plants are recovering under their improved management.

Prior to our excursion Emily and Peter Noble had done an excellent job organising the equipment required, including quadrats, the survey sheets, metal numbered tags and even, to denote gender, some golf tees for placing alongside individual plants. Drummond Golf generously donated 500 coloured golf tees to BEN to enable starting off the tagging process.

*Pimelea spinescens* flowers in winter so this makes July and early August the ideal time to undertake surveys. A remarkable 98.5% of plants were flowering when the survey was undertaken. Six quadrats were randomly located within the zone known to contain the *Pimelea* population and four of these quadrats were found to



Photo: Determining plant gender

have the target species with a total of 48 plants. The FNCB field team did photo-recording. GPS records were taken and the quadrats were marked with yellow-topped star standard posts.

Quadrat data, that were recorded for each plant found within the quadrat, included: the individual plant number (marked with metal numbered tags and coloured tees); the quadrat number, the sex of the plant, its spread and height; and estimates of biomass cover and percentage bare soil within each quadrat.

Members of the team also undertook an *emu parade* of the areas outside the quadrats looking for plants by walking parallel to each other and about 2 metres apart, finding, marking and recording plant details. Approximately a third of these plants were counted on the first

day and six BFNC members returned the following Thursday 17 August to continue the census.

**Postscript** By the end of a third day, on Tuesday 22 August, 755 plants had been tagged (including the 48 plants in the quadrats) and so it is hoped the task is completed for all the plants present there.

Andy Arnold

## **Club Meeting Minutes August 4, 2017**

### **Opening and Apologies**

Attendance: President John Gregurke welcomed 15 members and three visitors to the meeting.

Apologies: Denis and Elizabeth Thurgood, Sophie Akers, Dave & Sullivan Horwood, Steve Sorrell, Peter and Claire Dalman, John Mildren, John Petheram, Ambika and Indra Bone, Bill and Kathy Elder, Bill Murphy, Shirley Faull, Mark Moravec, Peter Noble, Ken Hammond and Anna Baulch.

### **Business Arising from Correspondence:**

Discuss the Club's possible involvement in a flora survey at Lake Goldsmith/ Stockyard Hill to help secure a sway powerline easement with Parks Vic as part of an offset for a Stockyard Hill Wind Farm. The outcome of the discussion was that Club members didn't feel that they had the plant identification skills necessary given the aquatic/ grassy/ riparian sites in question.

**Reports: Treasurer's Report:** Opening bal: \$8,122.03 Inc. \$74.32 Exp. \$184.30 Clos. bal.: \$8,012.05

**Listening for Nature project, Wombat Forest:** Emily and Roger participated in training run by the VNPA in using the Songscope Software to help with the identification of recorded bird calls. These calls will build Museum Victoria's birdsong database.

**The launch of the new Aboriginal name for Canadian Regional Park, "Woowookarung":** a very special, well-attended and significant occasion, officiated by Parks Victoria CEO Matt Jackson, with a Welcome to Country by Uncle Bryon Powell and Auntie Violet MacPherson from the Wadawurrung. Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio launched the new name.

### **General Business**

August field trip: Sunday August 6<sup>th</sup>, to Skipton Common Biodiver-

sity Reserve to survey the critically endangered Spiny Rice-flower, & to Linton Block. Emily and Peter to lead. To convoy or carpool to the site, meet in the Fed. Uni Carpark, cnr Gillies St and Gregory St for a 9.30am departure, OR meet at 10.15am at the Skipton-Beaufort Rd entrance to the reserve (look for the field nat's sign). Wear your winter woollies!

Planting at Woowookarung Regional Park on August 13 with Friends of Canadian Corridor. There are about 200 plants to plant between 10am and 12pm, with a cuppa and a sausage on offer afterwards.

September field trip: Please note that it is on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> Sep. Melton Botanic Gardens and nearby geological reserve.

### **Show & Tell / Field Reports**

Andy has been observing a Masked Lapwing family in Alfredton. On July 27 they moved with three young chicks from 10 Allura Dve to a vacant block at 45 Insignia Blvd for a week. There were only two chicks on July 30 when they moved east two blocks. Only one chick observed the next day with its parents.

Les told us about the two parasitising Vegetable Fungi species he found at Mt Macedon: *Cordiceps gunnii* & *C. robertsii*.

Tim found two White-faced Herons at Hastie's Reserve, Buninyong.

Emily reported excellent flowering of both Veined and Slaty Helmet Orchids, *Corybas diemenicus* and *C. incurvus* in Enfield State Park at Staffordshire Reef and Bliss Road Reserve, Dereel. Trim Greenhoods also flowering well in Dereel and Emerald-lipped Greenhoods *Pterostylis smaragdina* flowering well in Enfield State Forest n-e of Corio Dam. Dainty Wasp-orchids *Chiloglottis trapeziformis* look like they will start flowering in the next week in Enfield State Forest at Napoleons & Small Gnat-orchids *Cyrtostylis reniformis* and May-fly Orchids *Acianthus caudatus* will soon be flowering throughout the forest.

John and Elaine attended the Mid-Murray FNC Club Meeting and field trip during a visit to Murray Valley this month. The excursion went to Stony Crossing north of Swan Hill. The area was Black Box and Red Gum woodland along an anabranch of Wakool River. Salt-bush & Blue Bush were also growing in the area. They saw Grey Butcherbird, Little Corella and Blue Bonnets.



# CALENDAR 2017

## September

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|--------------|--|
| Fri 1        | <i>Native plants in the Melton Botanic Gardens:</i> David & Barbara Pye, Friends of the Melton Botanic Gardens |
| <b>Sat 2</b> | <i>Melton Botanic Gardens and nearby reserves:</i> Claire Dalman, club member                                  |
| Sun 17       | Brisbane Ranges: Geelong FNC bird Group (See p. 3 )  |
| Tues 26      | No committee meeting   |

# October

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|---------|--|
| Fri 6   | <i>Murnong Trail Damascus College: David Neate</i><br>science teacher & sustainability coordinator           |
| Sat 7   | <i>Damascus College bush block: David Neate: &amp;</i><br><i>Woowookarung Regional Park: J Gregurke</i> FNCB |
| 13-16   | SEANA Spring Camp, Ringwood FNC  |
| Tues 22 | Committee meeting at John Gregurke's   |
| 27-29   | FNCB club camp, Casterton  |

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**Meetings** are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

**Excursions:** Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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